

Moving beyond “wellness” in 2018

From Fitbits and other wearable fitness trackers bursting onto the scene five years ago, to mindfulness apps that lead users through meditation practices, to the emergence and proliferation of the modern-day yogi, we’ve all been riding the wellness wave in some way or another.

Employers’ role in wellness has evolved during this time, too. Many companies started offering wellness programs to improve employee satisfaction and engagement – and were often as simple as establishing walking groups. However, more businesses began to recognize the value that such programs can bring when taken seriously.

As a result, employee wellness is now an \$8 billion industry in the United States, promising companies to improve the health of their workforces and, in the process, secure a good ROI by reducing overall health-care costs. These programs range from nutrition and exercise advice, to smoking cessation and weight management.

While wellness programs have value when it comes to building company culture, employee engagement and teamwork, companies need to do more than hand out Fitbits if they want to move the needle on health-care costs. Despite their appeal and popularity, wellness programs don’t really affect a company’s bottom line that much; on average companies achieve a \$.50 ROI.

To truly have an impact--both on the health of employees and their bottom line--companies need to focus on those individuals with the most health risks (who are therefore also the costliest).

How are they doing this? Chronic-condition management.

Instead of simply encouraging employees to track their steps—a passive approach that may work with some employees, but likely won’t motivate the ones who need to make the most change—chronic-condition programs actively engage with the individuals who most need to improve their health and gives them the tools and support to do so.

Chronic-condition management programs work by stratifying employee populations based on those who have costly conditions like high blood pressure, diabetes and heart disease, or are at high-risk for developing them. Working one-on-one with these individuals, health coaches and other certified health

professionals provide medical advice and recommendations so the employee can learn the behaviors necessary to improve their health.

Not only is this method becoming more popular, it's proving incredibly effective. The same study that determined that wellness programs deliver a \$.50 ROI found that disease management programs produce a \$3.80 ROI.

Combined with other proactive employee health program offerings, like health screenings and risk assessments, primary care services, and fitness and nutrition coaching, chronic condition management programs can truly make an impact on employee health, and in the process, the company's financial health as well.

By Matt Riley